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DEPARTMENT FOR ECA/PE/C/CU, NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD

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SUBJECT: AFRICAN-AMERICAN INGENUITY IMPRESSES OMANIS

SUMMARY

1. Embassy Muscat brought a New York-based historical exhibition entitled "Black Inventions: Made in the USA," to Oman for its international debut, first in Salalah and then in Muscat. The collection of original artifacts and replicas of items invented by African-Americans reminded audiences of the ethnic and racial diversity of the United States and tangibly demonstrated the unique contributions that African-Americans have made to the scientific, economic, and cultural development of the U.S. Media coverage of the exhibition was abundant and very positive, with four of the six principal Omani newspapers publishing articles on the exhibition. End summary.

A TRIBUTE TO AFRICAN-AMERICANS

2. Following two years of intensive effort, the Embassy, in collaboration with the Department and the Omani Society for Fine Arts (OSFA), organized two viewings of the New York-based exhibition "Black Inventions: USA" in Salalah and Muscat from March 26-30 and April 2-6, respectively. This was the first time the exhibition had ever been shown outside of the U.S. It contained original artifacts and detailed replicas of items invented by African-Americans mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as documentary films on the lives of selected inventors. James Ince and Steve Guine, curators of the exhibit, explained to groups of high school and college students visiting the exhibition the historical, social and cultural contexts in which the inventors worked.

MAKING WORK EASIER

3. The exhibition, which consists of over 100 items designed and created by African-American men and women, included the traffic light invented by Peter Walker in 1925; the lawn sprinkler invented by J.H. Smith in 1897; the horse shoe invented by Oscar Brown in 1892; the pencil sharpener invented by J.L. Love in 1897; and the ironing board invented by Sarah Boone in 1882. The curators of the exhibition described how many inventions grew out of attempts to ease the toil of labor and in other cases to fuel the hopes of freedom from slavery and the dream of escape from poverty. Omanis also learned that most inventors received little benefit from their inventions. Many failed to patent them; others sold their ideas for small amounts convinced that whites would never purchase an item invented by an African-American.

MORE THAN ENTERTAINERS

4. One high school student commented after viewing the exhibition, "Before today, I only thought of Black Americans as good singers, dancers, and athletes. Now, I understand that they their skills and accomplishments are as important and varied as those of any other group." Another student lamented, "It is sad that many black Americans had to sell their inventions for almost nothing because white people would not acknowledge that items invented by black people could be of value."

EDUCATING YOUTH

5. Exhibition Curator James Ince remarked "Our aim is not only to give credit to the inventors, but also to inspire students to create, to let young people know that they can do anything they put their minds to." Omani educators responded to this by organizing student field trips to both the Salalah and Muscat viewings of the exhibition to observe the artifacts and listen to the curators' presentations on African-American history. Students from Rustaq Teachers College, Dhofar University, Sultan Qaboos University, the

American International School, Muscat Private School, and Azzan Bin Qais School visited the exhibition. Many of the students were enrolled in U.S.-related courses and saw the exhibition as an opportunity to enhance their understanding of their coursework.

MEDIA COVERAGE

16. Press coverage of the exhibition was ample and very positive including extensive quotations from the Ambassador's opening remarks at both the Salalah and Muscat openings. The English daily "Times of Oman" (circulation 25,000) published article on the exhibition on March 26 entitled, "Exhibition of African Items," and on April 7 the same newspaper ran a story, with a photograph of the Ambassador, entitled "Black Inventions Exhibition a Dream Come True For U.S. Envoy." The English daily Oman Tribune (circulation 20,000) of March 26 carried an article with the title, "Exhibition to Shed Light on African-Americans' inventions." On April 19, the English daily Oman Daily Observer (Circulation 20,000) printed a full-page article on the exhibition, which included photographs from its opening in Muscat, under the title "Bright and Black." Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) published a photograph of the exhibition opening in Salalah.

BALTIMORE